

FirstNet releases final RFP for deployment of public safety broadband network

Fierce Wireless Tech By Monica Allevan

January 13, 2016

After more than a year of dialogue with public safety and industry, the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) has issued its Request for Proposals (RFP) for the deployment of a nationwide broadband network dedicated to public safety.

The release follows 13 Requests for Information, a set of draft RFP documents, two Industry Day events and consultations with states and meetings with interested vendors. "We have developed this RFP in an open forum to create a 'first of its kind' public-private partnership for the network," said FirstNet CEO Mike Poth in press release. "As we move into the next phase of the process, we look forward to receiving competitive offerings to deliver the best possible network for public safety."

It's been a long road for the project. In December 2014, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Office of Inspector General released a report citing failure by board members to adhere to financial disclosure rules and not having adequate protections to monitor for conflicts of interest. FirstNet acknowledged what it characterized as some "administrative missteps" that were made in its early days and moved on, taking steps to address the earlier problems under the leadership of Chairwoman and wireless industry veteran Sue Swenson. Former police captain Poth came on board last August, when TJ Kennedy was named president.

The board approved the RFP in December but waited to release the documents until after the holidays. "This is an opportunity to revolutionize how first responders do their job, and we appreciate the valuable public safety feedback we have received to make this happen," Kennedy said in the release. "FirstNet is thrilled to issue an RFP that will promote innovation and deliver the best value to the public safety community."

The release of the RFP is likely to answer a lot of questions but also prompt more. FirstNet says it will conduct a public webinar on Friday, Jan. 15, from 1 to 3 p.m. Eastern time to review key RFP elements with interested parties, including states, tribes, territories, public safety stakeholders and market participants. The webinar will be available on FirstNet's website.

Proposals to the RFP are due April 29, 2016, with questions and capability statements due Feb. 12 and March 17, respectively. FirstNet said it will review and consider all responses submitted and anticipates making an award in the fourth quarter of 2016.

Just last week at, AT&T ([NYSE: T](#)) let it be known that it is interested in participating in the process. "It's a good opportunity for us and we're treating it as such. The timing of the spectrum, the position of the spectrum, the customer opportunity that comes with it, it's a rare event, so we're going to pursue it aggressively," AT&T Senior Executive Vice President of Technology & Operations John Donovan said during the Citi 2016 Internet, Media and Telecommunications Conference in Las Vegas.

At the same conference, Verizon ([NYSE: VZ](#)) EVP Marni Walden declined to comment, saying it was premature to comment before the RFP came out, while T-Mobile ([NYSE:TMUS](#)) EVP and CTO Neville Ray seemed more interested in getting spectrum in the 600 MHz auction, noting the unknowns surrounding the requirements for FirstNet.

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